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Rauws, Ward; van Dijk, Terry

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# A DESIGN-APPROACH TO FORGE VISIONS THAT AMPLIFY PATHS OF PERI-URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Ward Rauws* & Terry van Dijk*

*Department of Spatial Planning and Environment, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, The Netherlands

w.s.rauws@rug.nl

ABSTRACT

*Peri-urban areas are generally highly dynamic and fragmented zones. This is not only due to their functional and physical diversity and fragmentation, but also because they are the focus of a wide variety of perceptions and interests. This plurality causes on-going planning difficulties, affecting planners' ability to identify and strategically strengthen common interests for future development. In this article we claim that spatial visioning can be supportive in bridging the gap between contested 'perceived peri-urban realities' by revealing shared values and devising innovative ideas that blend seemingly contradictory demands. However, we suggest that visioning processes need designers to effective spark imagination and make visioning more productive. Designers can bring together unexpected combinations of stakeholders by redefining problems, strengthen the link between process and content and take responsibility for integral and appealing visions products.*

Keywords: peri-urban area, urban-rural relations, design-approach, visioning, designer, urban and regional planning

## Introduction

This paper discusses the significance of spatial visioning to achieve effective planning in peri-urban areas, as they are typically a space home to groups living in separate places. It also points out an omission in existing literature on visioning as we believe the value of conventional participation is overstated and the importance of creating a joint learning experience underexposed. Visioning can been seen as a process of forming or changing attitudes with the aim to develop shared images for the future of, in this case, peri-urban areas. Literature on visioning tends to emphasize the involvement of stakeholders. However, merely adding up the interests of all parties involved will not deliver visionary solutions. We argue that solutions typically are to be found in a next level – an overall integration and redefinition of problems and possibilities that collaborative planning alone will not deliver. Therefore, we claim the role of the designer in visioning to be vital.

Peri-urban areas are transitional zones between the urban and the rural, which is also revered to as rural-urban fringes or peri-urban interfaces (Simon, 2008; Rauws and De Roo, 2011). As peri-urban areas are dynamic, heterogeneous mosaics with natural, agricultural and urban functions (Allen 2003), developments in these areas are often the result of a mix of diverging urban and rural perceptions and interests (Asbeek Brusse et al., 2002). These perceptions and interests cannot be perceived as static and predictable. Instead, they are rather fluid, due to an interplay of contextual trends and location-specific changes which give peri-urban areas their transformative nature (see also Sieverts, 2003; Haartsen et al., 2003).

Consequently, the future directions of peri-urban developments are generally contested, mostly unpredictable and always evolving. Planners engage in influencing this process.

The inherently transformative nature of peri-urban areas, together with the typically fragmented institutional landscape (Mattingly, 1999; Simon, 2008), imply a particularly complex setting for conventional planning efforts. We argue that dealing the peri-urban area may require planners to develop a more inspirational role, in which designer-aided visioning can be an essential element. Visioning may be valuable for peri-urban planning in particular, as it potentially can mediate stand-offs between actors by uncovering shared values and interests. If the process actually has to be designed to encourage imagination, spatial visioning goes beyond conventional consensus planning, that Innes and Booher (1999) lament for lacking creativity, instead offering comprehensive concrete and credible images of the future that reframe problems and opportunities (Van Dijk, 2011).

Our position is that design-aided visions are essential to peri-urban areas because they can unite stakeholders, offer multifunctional, innovative ideas about the future and provide a framework for experiments that assist in the exploration of the 'possibility space' of peri-urban sites (Shipley and Newkirk, 1999; Peel and Lloyd, 2005; Healey, 2007). This paper does not aim to provide the empirical evidence for this, but to explore the importance of designers in visioning processes for peri-urban areas. Consequently, the focus of this study is not on analysing the plurality of peri-urban characteristics. Rather, it delves into the power of influencing people's perceptions of these characteristics by visioning processes. By exploring the role of designers in these processes, this paper is a modest attempt to contribute to the theoretical conceptualisation of visioning.

The paper is primarily theoretical, as it reveals the difficulties in planning for peri-urban areas, explores the role of identities of place in land use decision-making and defines the concept of visioning. Subsequently, with help of literature on framing and research on 'study by design' we examine the role of designers in spatial developments. Study by design comprises a discipline that is generating knowledge and understanding of areas at various levels of scale by studying the effects of varying design solutions in dynamics contexts (De Jong and Van der Voort, 2005). We highlight possible added value of designers in overcoming some of the identified difficulties in visioning processes. The following section begins with an examination of fragmented peri-urban identities that constitutes the difficulties of achieving common action. The patchwork of identities causes dissension over which futures have potential. The second section discusses theories that acknowledge the basic concepts of spatial visioning and the way it could help overcoming peri-urban fragmented identities, followed by a section that provides a telling example. Subsequently, the fourth section explores how the contributions of designers in visioning processes provide answers to the hesitations found in the literature about the usefulness of visioning. The final section presents our conclusions and research agenda for deepening our understanding of the role of designers in visioning.

**Planner versus transformative peri-urban areas**

Planning practice and research traditionally base their understanding of spatial processes on an urban-rural dichotomy (Asbeek Brusse et al., 2002; Caffyn & Dahlström, 2005; Simon, 2008). However, urban-rural relationships have changed fundamentally resulting in intergraded urban-rural landscapes of which the peri-urban area is the most prominent (Hidding, 2006; Davoudi & Stead, 2002). Various processes have contributed to the rise of these areas. First, migration flows

have redefined urban-rural relations. The mechanisation of framing, the economic activity traditionally dominating rural areas, has led to a migration of workers to urban centres (Ilbery, 1998; Lewin, 1998; Woods, 2005). More recently, this process is amplified by the emergence of the global service economy, strengthening the concentration of economic activities in urban centres (Fujita et al., 2001). Meanwhile, economic activities in the more rural areas change as well. A growing part of the rural areas open up for new economic activities, such as recreation, tourism and retail activities (Van Dam et al., 2002; Simon, 2008). Consequently, rural areas are increasingly diversifying in areas of consumption as well as production and types of employment in urban and rural areas become more and more similar. Other important processes amplifying urban-rural integration are the growth mobility and ICT revolution which enables distance-based working while enjoying semi-urban or rural landscapes fostering counterurbanisation (Pacione, 2001; Champion, 2001). Although peri-urban areas are hard to define, they are in general seen as transformative areas with a mosaic of urban en rural functions along the urban-rural gradient (Simon, 2008). As such they differ from suburban areas, which are predominately urban. In this section we further elaborate on the characteristics of peri-urban areas and explain the need for alternative, more vision-oriented planning approaches.

Research into the physical and functional aspects of peri-urban areas shows that they are often multifunctional zones within which land occupancy has a constantly and rapidly changing pattern and in which consumption and production activities compete for land (e.g. Heimlich and Anderson, 2001; Hornis and Van Eck, 2007). Moreover, most peri-urban regions are strongly influenced by the urban environment due to the provision of many services and public utilities by the city and because of the significant socioeconomic and cultural effect of the inflowing urban population (Friedland, 2002; Browder, 2003; Busch et al., 2006). Due to high levels of

migration, the social composition of peri-urban areas is quite diverse and changes over time. Moreover, property speculation and in some cases illegal building activities are common (Allen, 2003; Bocz et al., 2008). On this basis, we can suggest that peri-urban areas are highly dynamic, with a changing composition and temporal relationships and structures. What could these analyses possibly mean for peri-urban planning? In the debate on enhancing peri-urban planning, various scholars have already argued that planners need to overcome their urban or rural bias (Browder, 2003; Sieverts, 2003; Sharp and Clark, 2008). In this regard, Allen (2003) argues that in developing alternative strategies it is essential to combine various elements of urban, rural and regional planning.

However, in addition to physical and functional properties, of equal interest to planners is the question of what the patchwork of identities and dynamic nature of these areas means for consistent decision-making. What procedural (the formal frame of decision-making) and social (the role of society in decisions) challenges do planners confront in peri-urban areas? Understanding these properties may bring planners a step further along the path to enhancing strategies for transformative peri-urban areas. Thus, in the following sections the focus is not so much on peri-urban properties in a physical and functional sense but on the mosaic nature of peri-urban identity.

*Peri-urban challenges to regional identities*

Of vital significance but little discussed in the literature is that the peri-urban characteristics (dynamic, diverse, fragmented) have a social impact which complicates peri-urban planning: they cause regional identities to be weak, with much contestation or many conflicts of identity. We believe this to be an inherent property of the peri-urban area. Daniels (1999) also provides an

elaborate characterization of the peri-urban area as a zone of collision, emphasizing that it tends to be a place where controversies over land use are most visible and bitter.

Peri-urban residents share one *space* but live in different *places* (e.g. Kunstler, 1994). This mental division is the most challenging aspect for planners, causing difficulties for planning, since sustainable spatial developments often rely on common goals and collaborative planning efforts. Such goals are difficult to determine in peri-urban areas, where many conceptions of the identity of the space co-exist.

In analysing regional identities, three categories can been distinguished (Van Houtum and Lagendijk, 2001): a) strategic identities – rhetorical devices designed and employed by strategists to market and position the region in its wider context; b) cultural identities – based on a feeling of community and belonging borne by the inhabitants; and c) functional identities – a more factual description of how the region works economically. Here we concentrate on cultural identities because collective commitments and desires are lacking in peri-urban areas and this fragmentation is the most problematic for planning.

The lack of a common cultural identity, which lies behind peri-urban conflicts over land use, is a direct consequence of peri-urban dynamics, diversity and fragmentation. Because peri-urban areas are located in-between urban and the rural regions, they are home to an array of sub-communities with particular niche interests. For example, some farmers might attempt to continue farming, while others anticipate selling off their land for urban development. Then there are those who are neither farmers nor urbanites, who prefer to live in open spaces, perhaps keeping horses and enjoying a certain freedom. Moreover, there are the entrepreneurs and the manufacturers, expanding their business districts and office parks into the peri-urban area along the easily accessible regional road network. Furthermore, there are the more wealthy urbanites,

who desire new low-density housing and recreation facilities. In sum, a diversity of interests can be found in peri-urban areas.

In pursuit of their personal (and sub-community) interests, these various groups magnify the importance of some peri-urban properties over others and thus every group attributes a different cultural identity to the peri-urban area. For people enjoying the remaining rural landscapes for example, the region's identity may be more associated with the recreational qualities of the landscape than it would be for farmers, who regard these areas as a source of production. This also causes cultural identities to be partly reactive and strategic. Similarly, specific identities can be strengthened when new developments that threaten certain qualities of the area are proposed (Simon, 2005). One example is the reinforcement of regional identities as a reaction to globalization (Voisey and O'Riordan, 2001).

In addition, the identity of each group – all of whom push their own interests – is in constant transformation. Due to factors such as migration, technological innovation and economic fluctuations, peri-urban sub-communities constantly revise their interest and their desires (Paasi, 2001). For example, social interaction is increasingly oriented to the internet rather than public spaces – how does this change the structure of the built environment and what does it mean for regional identity? Farmers are subject to world market trends – they have to adapt and respond to these, but in what direction? Can companies that operate on a pan-European scale, reconsidering their location choices every few years, be trusted to serve as an anchor for regional economic identity, or has their commitment to one region become too fragile? Every subgroup's interests and their related cultural identity are constantly under revision.

*Lack of peri-urban identity as a challenge to peri-urban planning*

Deeply distinct perceptions of and demands on land trouble planning in peri-urban areas. This diversity hinders the emergence of a consistent and shared peri-urban identity, making it difficult to make sensible, concerted and sustainable choices about future land use. Due to the fragmentation of peri-urban identities, the political basis for deciding over future land use is also fragmented. For spatial policies to be successful, they need to connect to what the population considers wise, acceptable or desirable. Any normative assessment by the public of any government policy on land use draws on a normative framework – whether a person supports a policy depends on their general world-view as well as their view of the peri-urban area in particular. Do we want new factories, roads and houses here, or would that be harmful to our region as we know it? Identities are such frameworks for the normative assessment of optional policies.

When there is no clear regional identity to guide the creation and implementation of land use policies, planning may become lost in discussion and it may become difficult to find a basis for consistent peri-urban planning. Lack of identity causes the establishment of shared paths for future development to be problematic. Consequently, land use is also likely to be uninspiring and inefficient - Although individual developments may be in accordance with zoning plans, synergy between developments is in most situations limited (e.g. Bosc, 2005; Hudalah, 2010; Rauws & de Roo, 2011). We believe this to be a typical situation in and explanation of peri-urban areas – due to a host of conflicting interests held by those who share the peri-urban space, such areas have difficulty finding common ground. Those with conflicting interests who fight for their cause are ultimately confronted with a land use structure that satisfies no one. You cannot plan when you cannot choose and land use changes overwhelm you.

Facing a fragmented pattern of meanings in peri-urban areas, planners have to deal with the diversity of interests that makes it difficult to determine which future developments are acceptable. Visioning can help planners to overcome this complication, uncovering shared values by sharing and discussing images of the future, thereby contributing to a *fusion of horizons* (Dierkes et al., 1996). However, simply gathering stakeholders in order to find a compromise will be insufficient to uncover the main problems in land use issues – let alone finding a way out.

**Theories related to spatial visioning**

Given this peri-urban complexity, that obviously goes much deeper than land use conflicts alone, indeed extending into the fragmented and contentious perceived realities, the question is whether visioning can overcome it to support effective peri-urban planning. Although planning literature occasionally addresses the role of visioning in peri-urban areas, a number of related concepts is also used in the main theoretical perspectives on spatial visioning. These main theories are discussed below.

The complexity of planning practices, in which various actors, public and private, at different levels, attempt to and successfully influence the content of strategies for future development, has led to an awareness that strategic planning is increasingly 'a political process of focusing attention among the many parties whose activities collectively shape urban dynamics' (Healey, 2007, p. 182). According to Healey, there is a recognition that governmental bodies no longer have direct steering capacity but must rely on 'persuasion, seduction and inducements' (Ibid).

This approach emphasizes the importance of visionary planning practice, which in essence entails re-imagining our world in an attempt to create a foundation for collective action. It is a

process beyond bargaining, negotiation or consensus. Putting the right stakeholders around the table is not the highest goal. Visioning is about complicated situations with much contestation, needing a deep learning process that reconsiders frames of thought. The result is more integrative and innovative than a conventional plan would be.

Various theoretical notions concerning such visionary planning practices were collectively called ‘visioning’ by Canadian professor Robert Shipley. As illustrated by research conducted by Shipley (2000), the use of visioning in today’s planning is indirectly derived from Maslow’s idea of self-actualization. According to Maslow (1970), the concept of self-actualization implies that it is human nature to strive for the highest aspirations in such areas as morality and creativity, providing motives for present actions. Additionally, Shipley explains that the attention for this mechanism behind future goals and current actions reached planning through several spin-offs in various branches of the social sciences (see Shipley et al., 2004).

Visioning or vision planning became a popular strategy in planning during the 1980s and 1990s (Shipley 2002). It has various manifestations and many planning activities are gathered round the concept (Shipley, 2002; Gaffinkin and Sterrett, 2006). Moreover, a diverging set of methods for visioning is developed, for example Oregon model (Ames, 1997), community strategic visioning (Walzer, 1996) and community visioning (Okubo, 1997). Due to this diversity, a clear definition is hard to provide. In an attempt to create a more self-evident and clear meaning of the terms ‘vision’ and ‘visioning’, Shipley and Newkirk (1999) distinguished two major categories: substantive and procedural. The first category contains the actual products of visionaries – powerful impressions of potential futures in the form of maps, texts en stories advocating a unique way to integrate seemingly contradictory demands, together called visions. The second category refers to procedural structure of making a vision, with phases of

identification, goal setting and solution generation. This paper concentrates on the latter, considered as a process of forming or changing attitudes as a result of informative and persuasive communication (Shipley and Michela, 2006). Nevertheless, visioning products are of course closely related to visioning itself as they are both input and output for iterative processes of visioning. The paper is therefore focusing on visioning but not limited to this concept.

*Clarifying and defining visioning*

Acknowledging the broad interpretation and use of visioning Shipley and Michela argue that it can be defined as "the process of arriving at a consensual vision" (2006, p. 224). It is based on dynamic worldview as its premises is that the best way to plan for the future in a world of constant change is to trace back from a imagined future, build on inventiveness, intuition and reflexivity, instead of extending the present (Gaffinkin and Sterrett, 2006). Moreover, visioning is seen as a collaborative process (Helling, 1998), since the assumption of most proponents of visioning is that 'plans that resonate with citizen's deepest aspirations and values have the best change of being implemented' (Klein et al, 1993, p.10). Related to this assumption visioning is a process of persuasion. Visioning processes are undertaken with the aim to elicit a contribution of the stakeholders to the development path drawn up with help of visioning (Shipley & Michela 2006).

In contrast to designing spatial plans, aimed to decrease perceived contemporary problems, visioning processes are conducted to create shared and multidisciplinary ideas of the future and as such offer a common ground for guiding spatial developments. In our understanding visioning does not necessarily have to aim for maximum participation of direct and indirect stakeholders. As Shipley (2002) shows there is no evidence to believe that broad community involvement

results in more effective visioning processes. Also Innes and Booher (1999) are critical about the use of conventional meeting and literature offers 'few insights, however, about the actual dynamic of the discussions or of how discussions influenced players' attitudes. (…) the participants' "models in use" or theories of actions are defensive, serving as blinders that limit learning.' (idem, p.12) So, taking into consideration the context and the interests of stakeholders is essential for visioning to be productive (Shipley and Newkirk, 1998).

Visioning and its products are assumed to have several effects. According to Hajer and Poorter (2005) they have an orientating, coordinating and motivating function. Considering the first aspect, visioning may provide an overview of principles that are considered desirable for guiding planning activities (Zonneveld, 2005). Subsequently, visioning produces a framework, an *leitbild*, for process of change that enlightens the general, pursued, direction of development and strengthen the capacity to coordinate decisions on future investments (Dierkes, 1996; Rotmans et al., 2001; Peel and Loyd, 2005). Finally, visioning is considered to have a motivational effect on stakeholders to invest in line with the end's defined during the visioning process (Ames, 1997). However, some critical factors influencing the possible motivational effect need to be taken into account (see Shipley and Michela, 2006).

As highlighted earlier, the motivational effect is related to the persuasive properties of visions. This calls to mind the concept of 'storytelling', the propagators of which are surprisingly silent about visioning. According to Throgmorton (2003), determined to provoke a 'rhetorical turn' in planning, stories are developed and disseminated through such means as conversations, speeches, drawings, photos and movies and are often inspired by 'powerful memories, deep fears, passionate hopes, intense anger and visionary dreams' (Throgmorton, 2003, p. 128).

Visioning and storytelling are not the same, but are closely related. Stories are about perceptions of the present and about what the future is expected to bring. They are told within groups of people and they need groups of people to be created, modified and sustained. Visions, in contrast, are products of more selective and more targeted explorations of the future possibilities of a region. The connection: good visioning processes draw on stories and may ignite new stories. Visioning, is claimed to assist in coalition-building in contexts of conflicting interests and perceptions. Despite is converting capacity, it is difficult for planners to prevent different meanings being attached to visioning products (Hagens, 2010). Although not further elaborated in this paper, 'multiple visioning', where various visioning products co-exist, provides the opportunity to uncover shared values but also to 'detect and scrutinise conflicting issues' (Zonneveld, 2005).

*How visioning helps: in the social construction of reality*

Now that we have explained the relevance and concept of visioning, a special characteristic of the fragmented peri-urban identities requires elucidation to understand why visioning can be supportive in peri-urban planning. Namely, the peri-urban mental patchwork, which is at the heart of the complexity that frustrates coherent planning based on collective aims, appears less hopeless when we acknowledge that peri-urban identities are dynamic social products.

Torfing's (2005) discussion of the role of discourse is particularly helpful in understanding the creation and transformation of identities. He emphasizes that matter has no meaning in itself but is attributed meaning in a social process. Products of 'a precarious system, which is constantly subjected to political attempts to undermine and/or restructure the discursive context. […] What we say, think or do is conditioned by a more or less sedimented discourse which is

constantly modified and transformed by what we are saying, thinking and doing' (Torfing, 2005). Since peri-urban areas are transformative and dynamic, areas lacking a prominent identity may nonetheless have a latent identity ready to surface in the near future as result of the modification of perceptions.

Similarly, cultural geography tends to see the world as a physical reality that people and communities socially construct; selecting, ignoring and highlighting those elements relevant to their purpose (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001). To some extent, people reproduce other people's constructs of a place by adopting aspects of the information produced by others. In such a communicative, interpretive process, people produce representations of the place in various media such as texts, pictures and art (Hall, 1997; Holloway and Hubbard, 2001). In sum, three phases – construction, reproduction and representation – interact, leading people to constantly negotiate and revise their perception of a place.

This social construction is an opportunity for spatial visioning to intervene in the negotiation and revision of perceptions of place. Images of places, as part of visioning, can enter the social reality that has been constructed by individuals and communities by adding alternative representations of an area (Simon, 2005). Nelessen (1994) and McClure (1997) show how photographs can be used to build consensus and shape articulations of the residents' perception of their surroundings. In doing so, the various identities of an area can be formed and revised (e.g. Paasi, 2002). To conclude, visioning processes may have an impact on perceptions of a place and can therefore shape people's behaviour in decision-making processes with respect to land use.

To fully understand the role of visioning in affecting decision-making in planning processes through revising, or influencing people's perception of a place, frames and framing are

fundamental (Van Dijk, 2011; 2009). From a cognitive perspective, frames are mental structures that assist individuals to organize and interpret new experiences (Van den Brink, 2009). In other words, they provide a framework to process individual perceptions; they are 'ordering devices' (Hajer and Laws, 2006) or 'sense-making devices' (Weick, 1995). In this way, frames determine people's mental worlds, concerning both what is out there and *therefore* the wise way to act with respect to it (Van den Brink, 2009). Moreover, they not only concern the present but also which future transformations are desirable and which not (Ibid).

Frames are dynamic, but in the course of the ordering process meanings will solidify into frames that have more general validity in a community (Torfing, 2005). Nevertheless, the closure of frames should always be considered temporary. Frames help people to structure the world they live in; however, when new information is encountered the frame may be revised or replaced. Meaning is never fixed. The process of 'meaning construction' and its influence on decision-making provide opportunities for planning to intervene.

Discussing the meaning of what people see in their region, adding new information to perceptions of that region and steering their interpretation of information entails a level of planning which is beyond rational and communicative action; it is about the most fundamental level of what 'makes people tick'. This process of 'meaning construction' is also referred to as 'framing' (Benford and Snow, 2000). Here, the additional strength of spatial visioning for planning in dynamic, fragmented areas such as peri-urban regions becomes clear.

Visions resulting from visioning, can be communicated in the form of books, maps or texts – creating new representations of a certain area (e.g. Carton and Enserink, 2006). As Ford states, these representations 'infuse the presentation and we relate to our representations as if they are presentations that are "in-the-world" independent of us. What we experience as

presented depends on our representations, resulting in self-fulfilling prophecies in which representations begin to prove themselves by creating new "facts"' (1999, p. 482-483). An example of this is the narrative of loss (Grawford, 1999) concerning some rural areas facing economic restructuring, with the negative perceptions concerning entrepreneurs in these areas reinforcing each other to a point that restricts views on what is actually needed. Therefore, framing is not only an ordering device but also strategic, 'deliberative, utilitarian and goal-directed' (Benford and Snow, 2000 p. 624, in Van den Brink, 2009). To conclude, by feeding into the framing process, visioning could help to uncover shared values which may assist decision-making in culturally fragmented peri-urban areas. This is especially so because framing is not limited to the individual but may also be a collective process, where 'collective action frames' are products of a negotiated shared meaning (Gamson, 1992).

Concepts from social construction of places show in what way visioning can help; to bridge the gap between contested perceived peri-urban realities by influencing processes of framing and reframing creating shared ideas of desirable and promising paths of future development. In spite of the fact that visions are potentially powerful, also some critical factors have been identified in the literature (see Shipley & Michela, 2006; Shipley, 2002; Helling, 1998 for an extensive overview). These factors undermine effective visioning that renders solutions superseding the trivial. We believe integration, innovation and inspiration by designers is vital to visioning and overcome some of its drawbacks. Before structurally discussing the critical factors in visioning and elaborate on the supportive role of designers in these processes, we first provide an example of the difference designers can make in visioning

**Example of a designer approach in peri-urban visioning**

To show what creativity and redefinition of the situation can do, we provide an example. This example was not investigated as a case study. It is on its virtue selected to demonstrate what an innovative visioning based on a design approach can contribute in the context of fragmented interests and disjointed perceptions of place, which are typical to peri-urban conflicts over land use.

We take a fundamentally concrete level: deciding on a golf course in a heavily urbanized landscape. At Kerkehout, just outside the city of The Hague, the regional golf association wanted to establish a golf course to replace the original course that would be sacrificed to a new road in 2013. The golf club set out to find a new site, framing open spaces as potential alternative sites.

As is often the case in peri-urban areas where open space is precious, a deadlock situation occurred because the frames of other groups in the region did not match that of the golf association. The plan to convert the site selected at Kerkehout into a golf course led to a clash. The site consisted of a meadow landscape that had been ‘eaten away’ by urbanization, and residents around the site objected to the last remnants of the agricultural landscape being converted into sloping fairways.

The people living adjacent to the site framed it as historically valuable, attributing all kinds of intrinsic qualities to it, such as ecological values (which later research revealed to be relatively low) and historic integrity. Next to the open space, they also framed the projected golf course in a specific way. They assumed that it would follow the standard English model, with artificially sloping fairways and quasi-natural ponds and bushes in between, an image which stood in complete contrast to the current appreciated rectangular landscape of fields and canals. Above all, the local residents implicitly expected the land to be reserved exclusively for the use of members, thereby blocking any potential for outdoor recreation in the future.

Thus perceptions were seemingly exclusionary: on the one hand, the site was perceived as an excellent place for a golf course, on the other, it was perceived as a last enclave of country landscape. Without communication, the conflict of interests seemed impossible to resolve. However, despite this impasse, a designer based visioning process was started that effectively united the many existing demands (see the website green2.leeuwenbergh.nl).

The traditional model of visioning would have meant that the conflicting parties would engage in consensus building. Without redefining the site and the project, it would probably produce either further polarisation, or a compromise, or an agreement about compensating the residents. Instead, designers were asked to explore possibilities for marrying contradictory demands.

The designers proved that the perceived *contradiction* between preservation and development was false. They critically examined underlying perceptions of both the site and the projected golf course, allowing the design of a golf course that respected and even enhanced the current characteristics of the landscape. They organised meetings with the residents to study their concerns about the site. It appeared that people appreciated the site mainly for its assumed ecological values, as was one of the few not urbanised areas in the surroundings. However, the site hardly contributed to the quality of life of Kerkehout as it was inaccessible to the residents. Plans for footpaths were stalled for money shortage. The site also was poorly maintained. Their image of the golf course was one an exclusive club, for members only, with an artificial landscape of greens that would not have any value to ecology or landscape.

The designers deconstructed both assumptions and integrated seemingly contractory demands. In their innovative golf course design the original pattern of canals on the site would remain intact, their banks designed to slope more gently to allow natural development, and the

remaining original hedgerows were to be improved. The designers discovered that derelict parts of an old estate, including a mansion, gardens and access canal, lay on the site and they revitalized these in an integrated way, giving the clubhouse a prominent and central position in the area as a resurrection of the mansion. They designed cycle and pedestrian paths through the area, opening an area to the public which had previously not been accessible (see figure 1).

From a position of seeming contradiction, the site as well as the concept of a golf course were reframed, from being objectionable it became perceived as an *opportunity* to improve nature, landscape, cultural history and outdoor recreation. The golf course became a chance to achieve objectives that had long been waiting for funds. This vision managed to change the local opinion from ‘unanimously against’ to a ‘small majority in favour’. This example, however local, shows how a good vision can redress frames and create terms under which interests can be jointly served, which may bridge the gap in identities.

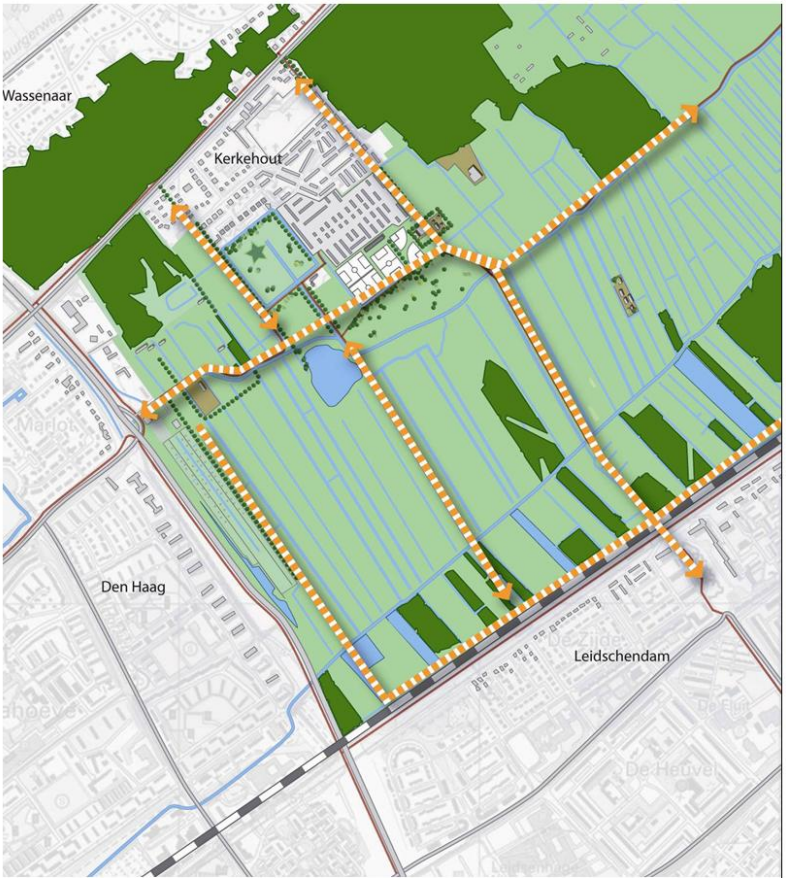


**Figure 1:** Although heavily contested at first, this design for a golf course has shown that interests which seem to conflict can in fact be synergetic (www.bosch-slabbers.nl/Nieuws/Golfbaan+Kerkehout, visited on 29 November 2010)

**Design approach and criticism to visioning**

Visioning processes need central creative people to help find direction, in order to deliver shared images about the future beyond the trivial bargaining and compromise. People that understand multiple strands of interests, concentrate on the totality of the problem and take responsibility for concrete outcomes. Does recognition of the vital role of the design to spark innovative ways in seeing and problem solving, take away the doubts over visioning? Many warn that although

visioning is considered promising in dealing with complex, unstructured planning challenges such as can be found in peri-urban areas, it should not be regarded as the ultimate planning tool. We cannot expect any vision (or story) to simply be adopted by a region and succeed. However, designers can help to overcome some of the critical factors of visioning as we can learn from integrating 'study by design' literature into the realm of spatial visioning. This section discusses the possible contribution of designers on various critical conditions on visioning which can be deducted from the literature. As such, a contribution to more advanced framework for visioning can be made.

Several scholars have undertaken critical research on visioning in general or specific vision processes in practice. Their studies have generated more detailed insights into possible limitations of visioning: coexisting future images, lack of concrete outcomes, knowledge symmetry, values and emotional motives.

Concerning the first condition, multiple formal and informal visions held and pursued by actors, make 'vision-compliant behaviour' less straightforward. In other words, processes are rarely centred around one vision, but rather use various, sometimes conflicting visions. This is most clearly explained by Throgmorton (2003), who claimed that creating persuasive stories entails 'juxtaposing various narratives against one another' (2003, p. 127) to build a fruitful dialogue amongst various actors. Throgmorton adds that storytelling is not only persuasive but also constructive. By discussing, debating and drafting visions and future stories of peri-urban places, planners and other actors shape 'community, characters and culture' (Ibid, p. 130), influencing how we expect ourselves to behave and how we conceive our environment and its future (Van Dijk, 2011). This is a very complicated and to some extent unpredictable process.

Visioning with the help of designers is likely to consciously and strategically connect to competing visions in order to find out the most widely convincing narrative possible. In dealing with urban and regional challenges, "design is an act of synthesis" (Klaasen, 2004 p.74). Designers have to create sense out of many interconnected factors and become mediators in these situations (Rosemann, 2001) and will use competing narratives in their integration. The core task of designers is to develop proposals for integrated spatial interventions often on the basis of all situational possibilities, whether physical or political. Doing so, they take a systems perspective rather than a sectoral perspective, supporting a holistic approach (Klaasen, 2004). Without designers, chances are that a group will stay in its own bubble.

A second condition emphasizes that visionary processes are often not carefully prepared: the timetable is unclear and achievements are insufficiently monitored (Helling, 1998; Shipley and Michela, 2006). In addition, as Helling has identified in her research on the Atlanta Vision 2020 process and Gaffikin and Sterrett (2006) in their evaluation of visioning programs in Ireland, too much focus on the process objectives and a lack of focus on outcome objectives can result in a limited number of planning actions. Therefore, planners and policymakers should be more precise when preparing a visioning process which can make a meaningful contribution to planning in peri-urban areas.

This all pleads for bonding forms of creativity and for responsiveness to the site, public opinion and local politics. Too much managerial emphasis is a pitfall that eclipses rather than compensates the value of a powerful substantive central idea. On this aspect a stronger position for the designer in visioning could be beneficial. A designer is primarily involved in creative processes to develop plan, vision or design which is in principle implementable (Breen, 2002). At the same time, as Dutch practices show, they are increasingly also the designer of the process

(Hajer, *et al*, 2006). And because the process would ideally be shaped according to the developing content of the vision, designers can add a unique linkage. In short, a more prominent role of designers in visioning may avoid the limitation of solely process outcomes as designers turn ambitions into concrete, feasible and embedded designs.

The third difficulty with visioning is the unequal levels of knowledge and means between actors participating in the process. Many actors in visioning processes do not have the means (e.g., expertise, time and budget) to interpret and evaluate the complex data underlying the various visions (Helling, 1998). In addition, during a visioning process powerful actors will strive to eliminate or marginalize competing stories that are not in their interests (Throgmorton, 2003). Therefore, reserving funds which offer assistance to less powerful, less wealthy and less well-educated actors could strengthen their position during the process (Helling, 1998).

Designer-led processes are about 'making sense of things together' (Forester, 1989, p.127; Lawson, 1990), about jointly learning about the essence of problems and opportunities. The process will balance knowledge inequalities, but also reduce the importance of complex scientific knowledge, the importance of which becomes embedded in practical wisdom.

The fourth critical condition concerns the connections between the vision ideal and the values of community members (Shipley and Michela, 2006). Visions are only as powerful as their fit to perceptions and ambitions in the region. That is where the emphasis on collaborative processes comes from. To be successful, a vision has to set high goals (Shipley, 2002, p.13) that at the same time should not become utopias (Peel and Lloyd, 2005). The urgency and relevance of the vision's narrative should be well embedded in both the hearts and minds of the actors. Therefore, visioning that is chiefly based on future dreams, beautiful sketches and vague commitments is not sufficiently relevant and legitimate. Visioning should directly connect to the

present challenges, available means and ethical boundaries. Additionally, the solution to the situation must feel as the merit of the group involved – introducing a solution from outside in an early stage may spoil that feeling (Shipley et al, 2004, p.208). Avoiding this trap starts at the first stage of visioning, determining the purpose. A fixed purpose for a visioning process undermines the commitment and responsibility stakeholders are prepared to take. Leaving participants free to discuss the purpose of a visioning process may strengthen their motivation to contribution realizing the vision (Helling, 1998; Shipley & Michela, 2006).

Designers can be of help in the process of defining a shared purpose for visioning. As shows by Akin (2001), they are experts in redefining the constraints of the problem space. It is a unique contribution of study by design, as designers are trained to overcome a one-dimensional concentration of problem solving by developing alternative projections and conceptions leading to revision of problem questions and perceptions (Geldof & Janssens, 2007; Klaasen, 2004).

Finally, visioning needs to result in products that are rhetorically powerful; consistent, elegant (Throgmorton, 1996; Sandercock, 2003), clearly positioned in time, in which people recognise their position, opportunities and responsibility (Myers and Kitsuse, 2000). In this process Shipley and Michela (2006) have made plausible with their experiments that effective visioning builds on both emotion and reason to influence stakeholders attitude towards the vision. It requires a conscious effort from people that can persuasively yet practically tell stories through images and text. Designers are trained to do just that.

In developing their products designers take into considerations both logical/rational and aesthetic arguments (Breen, 2002). As such they do not only feel responsible for the content of a vision, but also way it is presented and visualized. They can therefore help to connect visioning products better with the emotional motives that play a role in visioning processes.

To summarise, critical reviews on visioning literature and evaluations of visioning programs make clear that we should not think too simple about the capacity of visioning to bridge contested perceived peri-urban realities. This is not a given. However, designers can contribute in overcoming some of the critical conditions of visioning, see overview Table 1. The creative and synthesizing capacity of designers combined with their practical oriented attitude enables the planning community to further develop the potentials of visioning. Therefore, we argue that visioning should be considered as a supportive tool to foster cohesive peri-urban planning strategies.

| **Key characteristics of visioning** | **Critical conditions** | **Added value of designers** |
|---|---|---|
| Building shared images for the future | Coexisting visions undermining 'vision-compliant behaviour' | Design as an act of synthesis |
| Collaborative process | Too much focus on process objectives, resulting in limited number of planning actions | Translate ambitions into concrete, feasible and embedded designs |
| | Unequal levels of knowledge | Jointly learning and integrating practical wisdom |
| Enlightening the general, pursued, direction of development and strengthen the capacity to coordinate | Too earlier fixed purpose | Developing alternative projections and conceptions leading to revision of problem questions and perceptions |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| decisions on future investments | | |
| Motivational effect on stakeholders to invest in line with the ends defined during the visioning process | Both rational and emotional motives count | Take responsibility for the presentation and visualization of visioning products, which can have an emotional impact |

**Table 1:** An overview of the key characteristics of visioning, its critical conditions and the possible contribution of designers in overcoming these conditions.

**Conclusions and research agenda**

If we are to deal properly with the dynamics of peri-urban areas, it should be considered that such regions could benefit from a mode of planning that overcome fragmented identities. Deconstructing and adjusting patterns of thinking that are taken for granted helps actors to find collective goals for the future. Such approaches should assist the articulation of overall interests in a process that entails more than mere compromise or the negotiation of priorities related to the most pressing needs. Peri-urban areas must be assisted to find visions that reframe taken-for-granted views, using ideas that serve no single actor but which are always intended to achieve multiple goals in an astute, comprehensive manner.

These approaches are based on interactive, creative anticipation of emerging processes rather than the implementation of predefined policy. Visioning, despite aiming to do just that, in practice may expect too much from putting people around the table. They are not likely to achieve integrative, innovative and inspiring solutions without being paired with a designer's mind – someone that has no stake in the area other than to find out what future course would

unite across the myriad of interests and opportunities. Visioning can profit from designers as they bring in their unique creative and synthesising capacities and practical oriented attitude. We believe it to be vital to introduce an actor with these skills to help a region find a long-term overall perspective, beyond sectoral interests, in order to enable vision-making to actually reveal shared values encompassed by the variety of 'perceived peri-urban realities' and thus strengthen collective action.

Developing a vision that is sufficiently credible, relevant and legitimate, it can provide smart concepts that create unity in diversity. At the same time, good spatial visions have a conceptual core that allows it to remain flexible; they adapt and can be transformed in interaction with different arenas and time-related conditions without losing their core ambitions and motivational capacity (Healey, 2007). Moreover, in peri-urban areas where the institutional landscape is often fragmented, the bridging capacity of vision-making can be especially supportive to planning when paying more attention to local, formal and informal strategies and knowledge production (Van Dijk, 2011). Planners may not necessarily make spaces, but they do help to shape future places.

'Visioning' as an interactive process and 'vision', as a potentially powerful image advocating a unique way to integrate seemingly contradictory demands, have to evolve simultaneously: the 'visioning' process generates an important part of the fundamental information to draft a 'vision'. However, the 'vision', which can also be input instead of visioning output, may embody the prime reason why the stakeholders get together in the first place. Without a budding conception of an integrated future course provided by a vision, it will not be clear who should sit together and why, because the vision redefines the problems and opportunities in the area. Sense of urgency and relevant sets of stakeholders may be *induced* by

the developed vision, rather than be the reason of starting a visioning process. The relation is co-constitutive.

Although many examples of well-performing regional visions are available, it is challenging to prove empirically that visioning and its comprehensive products are indeed the key to progress and to the provision of high-quality solutions. We simply cannot isolate the power of a vision from other considerations and forces that influence the way regions develops. In fact, good visions can be felt to be so straightforward that they may be considered to have been discovered or achieved spontaneously, without the assistance of planners and designers.

Thus, although widely recognized as reflecting planning practices, ideas about visioning and storytelling are yet to find a rigorous methodological basis for empirical testing. We invite planning scholars to explore such testing methods. Not only on the usefulness of visioning in itself, but in particular on success factors with respect to the process; who takes part, how are roles divided, how to structure the process, how to include designers. Semi-experimental settings with randomly composed groups could be used to demonstrate a treatment effect of including designers, as well as comparing the use of drawing techniques with negotiation techniques.

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